

RSU 2's Standards-Based, Learner-Centered Framework



The vision of RSU2 is to be a system of student-centered learning.

Guiding Principles

Our beliefs about children & learning:

1. All students can learn
2. Students learn in different ways and in different timeframes
3. Successful learning breeds continued success which influences esteem, attitude and motivation
4. Mistakes are inherent in the learning process
5. Learning and curiosity are basic human drives
6. Student learning requires positive and validating relationships with teachers
7. Student learning is enhanced by meaningful, real-life experiences requiring complex thinking
8. Learning is fun
9. Student learning is fostered by frequent, formative feedback
10. Student learning is future-focused

Our beliefs about teachers and teaching:

1. Teachers are models of continuous learning and improvement
2. Teachers inspire, motivate & empower children
3. Teaching is collaborative and involves on-going learning
4. Teachers set the conditions for a safe, welcoming, joyful classroom environment
5. Teachers are knowledgeable and competent in pedagogy and human development
6. Teaching reflects the current research on learning and cognition
7. Teachers relate to & connect with students
8. Teaching and learning are a cause and effect relationship
9. Teachers are the single most important factor in students' learning
10. Teachers are future-focused

Our beliefs about learning communities:

1. All stakeholders in the community are partners in educating our children
2. Learning Communities (LCs) align all systems, policies, practices to support the principles that students learn in different ways and in different timeframes
3. LCs have high expectations for all students and staff
4. Learning communities embrace accountability and strive for continuous improvement
5. LCs encourage and support risk taking and innovation
6. LCs have a clear, shared purpose and direction
7. All members of the LC are committed to the mission and vision and are empowered to achieve it
8. Communication in LCs is frequent, open, and transparent
9. LCs are inclusive and embrace diversity
10. LCs are future-focused

Process for Developing Standards-Based, Learner-Centered Structures

I. Curriculum and Instruction:

- a. Align measurement topics across each learning community.
- b. Focus on developing learner-centered instructional strategies including regrouping and strategic intervention.
- c. Implement software that tracks the child's academic growth over time.
- d. Create common rubrics and exemplars to help establish greater consistency in scoring.
- e. Establish common, formative assessments and / or the creation of an assessment bank.
- f. Build systems to allow for proficiency advancement.
- g. Implement fluid master schedules that allow for the regrouping of learners when necessary.
- h. Develop common graduation standards and move from Carnegie Unit / credit earnings to course completions for graduation.
- i. Increase opportunities for online and project-based learning, both within and outside of the classroom.
- j. Include comprehensive integration of education technology as an instructional tool and learning tool.
- k. Assess learner progress on national assessments.

II. Leadership:

- a. Focus staff development on latest research of effective classroom-instruction.
- b. Principals develop a yearly strategic plan for instructional support of teaching teams.
- c. Develop curriculum leaders amongst the teachers and learners; leadership teams developed within each learning community.
- d. Establish protocols for teachers to conduct peer observations and provide feedback.

III. Articulation Agreements with Higher Education:

- a. Continue communication with institutions of higher learning about standards-based instruction and transcript details including school profiles.
- b. Provide college opportunities in each high school including dual enrollment opportunities that may serve as high school and / or college graduation criteria.

IV. Community Learning Partnerships:

- a. Develop systemic practices within each learning community to allow feedback to be given from all stakeholders.
- b. Utilize career and workforce partnerships to learn outside of our classrooms.
- c. Coordinate efforts with local and state agencies that support high achievement for all learners.

RSU 2 Commitments

A. Commitment to Standards-Based Curriculum Design:

RSU 2 and the Maine Cohort for Customized Learning have developed a viable learner-centered curriculum that is based on the Maine Learning Results, National Common Core Standards, and organized into units of study referred to as “measurement topics.” Measurement topics (MTs) are similar to standards. The development of the measurement topics was completed under the direct guidance of a research associate with Marzano Research Labs and has undergone two revisions prior to implementation. The purpose of such a curriculum framework is to ensure there is focused and strategic instruction across the RSU on specific areas of knowledge and skills and to assess such learning in a manner that guarantees every learner will master the desired knowledge or skills.

A measurement topic format provides a vehicle for teachers to keep track of the progress of individual learners on each MT using teacher-designed formal and informal assessments as well as district summative assessments. To these ends a set of K – 12 measurement topics have been designed in math, language arts, science and social studies, as well as in all specialty areas. The specific knowledge and skills contained in the measurement topic learning targets is the guaranteed and viable curriculum for children in the RSU. A defined and available curriculum also allows children to set learning goals and work at teacher pace as they strive to reach proficiency or advanced levels of learning.

B. Commitment to Assessment Practices that Support Learning:

A standards-based system requires that assessment practices involve a clear understanding of the measurement topic and learning targets within it as well as identify what it will look like when accomplished. We will build processes that allow us to:

- Make the learning target explicit, public, and accessible so that the measurement topic is known and can be met because learners know what is expected (i.e., written descriptions such as rubrics and key exemplars).
- Use formative assessment data to check and adjust instruction, monitor student progress, give explicit feedback, track progress, and celebrate success.
- Involve learners in discussions about assessment, including grading, throughout the teaching/learning process.
- Give learners “voice and choice” in determining how they demonstrate evidence of learning.
- Assessment results and scores measure against a performance level, not against the performance of others.
- Use quality assessments and accurately record evidence of achievement.

C. Commitment to Learner-Centered Instructional Strategies:

The instructional model in RSU 2 has been highly influenced by the latest researchers on learning and motivational theory. The results of this research, as well as the hundreds of hours of training received from Maine native Beatrice McGarvey of Marzano and Associates, as well as the Re-Inventing Schools Coalition, has guided the RSU in establishing a common language of instruction. A commitment has been made to provide our educators the opportunity to learn these skills and receive feedback on their use of these effective instructional strategies. The following strategies are a summary of the meta-analysis on effective instruction.

- Use of each of the following strategies is considered a simple level of implementation. Being able to monitor and respond to the effectiveness of the strategy indicates a complex level of understanding and implementation.
 - What will we do to establish and communicate learning goals, track learner progress, and celebrate success?
 - Make a distinction between learning goals and learning activities.
 - Use a rubric or scale for each learning goal.
 - Have learners identify their own learning goals.
 - Assess learners using a formative approach.
 - Have learners chart their own progress.
 - Recognize and celebrate growth
 - What will we do to help learners effectively interact with new knowledge?
 - Ask questions that require learners to elaborate on information (General inferential questions, elaborative interrogations).
 - Have learners record their conclusions in written or other creative forms (could be digital or a real-life experience) and present their learning non-linguistically. (Notes, graphic organizers, dramatic enactments, mnemonic devices employing imagery, academic notebooks)
 - Have learners reflect on their learning
 - What will we do to help learners practice and deepen their understanding of new knowledge?
 - Provide learners with tasks that require them to examine similarities and differences. (Comparing, classifying, metaphors, analogies)
 - Help learners identify errors in their thinking and that of others.
 - Provide opportunities for learners to practice skills, strategies, and processes in and out of school.
 - Determine the extent to which cooperative groups will be used.
 - Assign purposeful homework that involves appropriate participation from the home.
 - What will we do to help learners generate and test hypotheses about new knowledge?
 - Engage learners in experimental inquiry.
 - Engage learners in problem solving tasks.
 - Engage learners in strategic decision-making.
 - Engage learners in investigation tasks.
 - Have learners design their own tasks.

- Determine the extent to which cooperative learning structures will be used.
- What will we do to engage learners?
 - Use games that focus on academic content.
 - Use inconsequential competition.
 - Manage question and response rates (wait time, response cards, choral response, response chaining)
 - Use physical movement (give-one/take-one, body representation, vote with your feet, fist to five)
 - Use appropriate pacing.
 - Demonstrate enthusiasm and intensity for content.
 - Engage learners in friendly conversation.
 - Provide opportunities for learners to talk about themselves.
 - Utilize the practices of motivational theory.
- What will we do to establish or maintain classroom rules and procedures?
 - Organize the classroom for effective instruction and learning.
 - Establish a small set of rules and procedures (Code of Conduct / Cooperation).
 - Interact with learners about classroom rules and procedures.
 - Periodically review rules and procedures making changes as necessary.
 - Use classroom meetings to address concerns and problem solve collaboratively.
- What will we do to recognize and acknowledge adherence and lack of adherence to classroom rules and procedures?
 - Use simple verbal and non-verbal acknowledgement.
 - Use tangible recognition when possible.
 - Involve the home in recognition of positive learner behavior.
 - Use direct-cost consequences (time-out, overcorrection).
 - Use group and home contingency plans that support each other.
 - Have a strategy for high-intensity situations.
- What will we do to establish and maintain effective relationships with learners?
 - Take the time to know each learner.
 - Engage in behaviors that indicate respect for each learner.
 - Bring learners interest into the content and personalize learning activities.
 - Engage in behaviors that communicate interest in learners.
 - Use humor when appropriate.
 - Consistently enforce positive and negative consequences.
 - Project a sense of emotional objectivity (recognize that emotions are natural and inevitable, monitor your thoughts and emotions, reframe).
 - Maintain a cool exterior.
- What will we do to communicate high expectations for all learners?
 - Identify expectation level for learners by creating learning goals in partnership between the learner, teacher, and parent(s).
 - Identify and reduce differential treatment of low-expectancy learners (making less eye contact, smiling less, making less physical contact or maintaining less physical proximity, engaging in less playful or light

dialogue, calling on them less, asking them less challenging questions, not delving into their answers as deeply, rewarding them for less rigorous responses).

- Make sure low-expectancy learners receive verbal and non-verbal indications that they are valued and respected (make eye contact, smile, make appropriate physical contact, maintain proximity, engage in playful dialogue).
- Ask questions of low-expectancy learners.
- When low-expectancy learners do not answer a question correctly or completely, stay with them (demonstrate gratitude, do not allow negative comments from others, point out what is correct and incorrect, restate the question, let them temporarily off the hook).
- What will we do to develop effective lessons organized into a cohesive unit?
 - Identify the focus or goal of a unit/measurement topic (knowledge, issues, learner exploration).
 - Plan for lesson segments that will be routine components of every lesson.
 - Plan for content specific lesson segments.
 - Plan for opportunities to check and adjust when learning is not occurring as planned.
 - Develop a flexible draft of daily activities for a unit.

D. Commitment to use and develop effective, learner-centered teaching strategies:

- Identifying similarities and differences – comparison tasks, classifying tasks, and the use of metaphors and analogies. This strategy focuses on the mental processes that learners can use to restructure and understand information.
- Summarizing and note-taking – Summarizing is restating the essence of text or an experience in as few words as possible in a new, yet concise form and requires the ability to synthesize information. Learners must be able to analyze information and organize it in a way that captures the main ideas and supporting details that is stated in their own words. Learners can summarize information in different ways, including deleting information that isn't important to the overall text, substituting some information, and keeping some information.
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition –These strategies enforce that “success breeds success”. They address learners’ attitudes and beliefs. Most learners are not aware of the importance of believing that their level of effort is related to their achievement. When learners are rewarded or praised for achieving specific goals, their level of achievement is higher.
- Homework and practice – Homework and Practice both provide opportunities for learners to practice, review, and apply knowledge. Establish a homework policy, tell learners if homework is practice or preparation for upcoming units, maximize the effectiveness of feedback by varying the way it is delivered. Practice: Assign timed quizzes for homework and have learners report on their speed and accuracy. Focus practice on difficult concepts and set aside time to accommodate practice periods.

- Nonlinguistic representations – This strategy can enhance a learner’s ability to represent and elaborate on knowledge using mental images. When learners elaborate on knowledge, they are able to understand it in greater depth and be more successful at recalling it. Nonlinguistic representations can include graphic representations, mental pictures, physical models, drawings, and kinesthetic activities. New knowledge is usually presented in linguistic form. When learners are also able to use imagery, the effects on achievement can be significant.
- Cooperative Learning – When learners are provided with opportunities to interact with each other in a variety of ways their learning is enhanced. These activities support the ideas that there should be a variety of criteria to group learners; that there should be formal, informal and base groups and that the size of learning groups should be continually monitored.
- Setting objectives and providing feedback – Setting objectives establishes a direction for learning. Once learners understand the parameters of an objective, they should brainstorm to determine what they know and what they want to learn. Specific, timely, and regular feedback to learners enhances their learning. Also, feedback should include an explanation of why an item is correct or incorrect and be criterion referenced. Learners should understand where they stand relative to a specific target or learning goal.
- Generating and testing hypothesis –This strategy includes several processes including systems analysis, invention, experimental inquiry, decision making, and problem solving. learners should be asked “what if?” as they plan and conduct simple investigations that include generating and testing hypothesis.
- Cues, Questions, and Advanced Organizers – Giving learners a preview of what they are about to learn or experience helps them activate prior knowledge. This strategy gives learners the opportunity to connect what they already know to what they need to know. Questions should focus on what is central and most important. Advanced organizers are most useful for information that is not easily presented in a well-organized manner.

E. Commitment to Monitoring Learning and Providing Feedback:

An essential element of the RSU 2 standards-based, learner-centered system is to closely monitor learning and provide on-going feedback. Learning is monitored in a variety of methods depending on the content level, content area, or age of the learner. A large body of research related to motivational theory supports the concept of providing feedback on learning.

Some background and guidelines regarding monitoring learning and formative feedback practices are noted here:

- Learning goals drive instruction and are easily identified as the “Level 3” learning. Every lesson should be driven by a learning goal, which is clearly communicated to the learner, understood by the learner, and tracked by the learner and teacher.

- Teachers will track specific learning targets using formative assessments and identify learners in need of additional instruction.
- Tracking progress is an important element of learner motivation and learning.
- Some learners may benefit from sharing the tracking responsibility with the teachers.
- Teachers will use the electronic scoring and reporting system (Educate) that stores evidence of learning on measurement topics.
- Learners should be given feedback on their learning and the learning should be assessed, monitored, and tracked so that instruction can be adjusted and learning improved.
- Formative feedback occurs while knowledge is being learned.
- Formative assessments are defined as any activity that can be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which learners engage.
- Scores are only one form of feedback to the learner on the degree to which he/she has learned the knowledge.
- Feedback from classroom assessments should provide learners with a clear picture of their progress on learning targets and how they might improve.
- Feedback is provided in many forms including, but not limited to: verbal or written guidance, one-on-one tutoring, teacher conference, peer review, teacher notes, and scoring.

F. Commitment to Continuous Improvement:

RSU 2 will ensure that improvement is never ending. In a high functioning organization, continuous improvement is strategic and deliberate. A systemic and systematic approach to continuous improvement in the RSU will allow us to create a climate of refinement and innovation. Opportunities for improvement will be met with a sense of urgency and a solution-finding mindset with the goal of always being learner-centered.

Curriculum & Instruction Action Steps

Action Step	Responsible Partner(s)	Check and Adjust
Align measurement topics across each learning community.	Curriculum director & principals	Fall 2011 Summer 2012
Focus on developing learner-centered instructional strategies including regrouping and strategic intervention.	Superintendent, curriculum director, principals, learning communities	2011-2012 School Year Assess consistency summer 2012
Implement software that tracks the child's academic growth over time.	Maine Cohort for Customized Learning (MCCL), curriculum director & IT director	2011-2012
Create common rubrics and exemplars to help establish greater consistency in scoring.	MCCL, curriculum director, principals, learning communities	2012-2013
Establish common, formative assessments and / or the creation of an assessment bank.	MCCL, curriculum director, principals, learning communities	2012-2013
Build systems to allow for proficiency advancement.	Curriculum director, principals, & guidance counselors	Summer 2012
Implement fluid master schedules that allow for the regrouping of learners when necessary.	Curriculum director, principals, & guidance counselors	2012-2013
Develop common graduation standards and move from Carnegie Unit / credit earnings to course MT completions for graduation.	Policy & Personnel Committee	2013 - 2014

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Increase opportunities for online and project-based learning, both within and outside of the classroom.	Superintendent, curriculum director, IT director, principals	Spring 2012
Include comprehensive integration of education technology as an instructional tool and learning tool.	Curriculum director, IT director, tech integrators, learning communities	2012 - 2013
Assess learner progress on national	Curriculum director & principals	2011 – 2012 = NWEA, NECAP, SAT

Leadership Action Steps

Provide training for all teachers that delivers and models the latest research on effective instruction.	Curriculum director & principals	2011-2012 all current teachers complete 2012 – 2013 = new teachers
Staff development focused on latest research of effective classroom-instruction.	Curriculum director & principals	2012 - 2013
Principals develop a strategic plan for instructional support of children, parents, teaching teams, and the learning community as a whole.	Superintendent, curriculum director, principals	Fall 2012 - 2013
Develop curriculum leaders amongst the teachers and learners; leadership teams developed within each learning community.	Superintendent, curriculum director, principals, learning communities	2012 - 2013
Establish protocols for teachers to conduct peer observations and provide feedback.	Superintendent, curriculum director, principals, learning communities	2012 - 2013

Higher Education Action Steps

Continue communication with institutions of higher learning about standards-based instruction and transcript details including school profiles.	Superintendent, curriculum director, principals, high school guidance counselors	Ongoing
Provide college opportunities in each high school including dual enrollment opportunities that may serve as high school and / or college graduation criteria.	Superintendent, curriculum director, principals, high school guidance counselors	Spring 2012 – continue development of partnerships

Community Learning Partnership Action Steps

Systemic practices developed within each learning community to allow feedback to be given from all stakeholders.	Superintendent, curriculum director, IT director, principals, learning communities	2012 - 2013
Utilize career and workforce partnerships to learn outside of our classrooms.	School Board, superintendent, curriculum director, IT director, principals, learning communities	2012 - 2013
Coordinate efforts with local and state agencies that support high achievement for all learners	School Board, superintendent, curriculum director, IT director, principals, learning communities	2012 - 2013